

Comment on the News 4

Why say no?

Why did the French vote no in the referendum on the European Union constitutional treaty held on 29 May 2005? The answer lies in the very first words of the very first constitutional document, the Treaty of Rome, entered into on 25 March 1957. I will set them out in full-

His Majesty The King of the Belgians, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, the President of the French Republic, the President of the Italian Republic, Her Royal Highness The Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, Her Majesty The Queen of the Netherlands,
Determined to lay the foundations of an *ever closer union* among the peoples of Europe . . .

That was almost fifty years ago. If during half a century countries get *ever closer* there may come a moment when they get too close for comfort. For the French, co-founders of the association which in 1991 under the Treaty of Maastricht changed its name from the European Community to the European Union, that moment came last Sunday.

Why did it all suddenly get too much for our French cousins? There are numerous reasons. The influx of new countries from eastern Europe, formerly used to the strictness of Soviet rule, worries them. Their President's peculiar wish to add the huge Muslim territory of Turkey to Christian Europe alarms them. The growing industrial power of the Asian hordes in China, India and elsewhere threatens to take away their jobs. The advent of a harsh wind called free trade, and another called market forces, terrifies the farmers and industrial workers who have been feather-bedded for so long. They want state socialism to continue, and what they were suddenly being offered was free enterprise. Their country, they noticed with distaste, was being overrun and subverted by aliens with dusky complexions and ways that were not French.

So Marianne revolted.

What will happen now? Mr Blair says there should be a period for reflection. There is bound to be that, and he will supervise it when he takes over the running of the European Union for the second half of this year. But what will reflection lead to?

I predict that those words about *ever closer union*, so faithfully, heedlessly and blindly obeyed through the past half century, will be summarily removed from the treaties and other governing instruments. Europe will not be driven on any longer by an unrealistic spur. It will fall back to being a true community of nation states.

And almost everyone in Europe will breathe a sigh of relief.